



Make space for... ...a joint network of well-managed marine protected areas in the North-East Atlantic and the Baltic Sea!

briefing

OSPAR

In 1998, the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), adopted a new Annex V and Strategy "... to protect and conserve the biological diversity of the maritime area and its ecosystems which are or could be, affected as a result of human activities [other than pollution], and to restore, where practicable, marine areas which have been adversely affected" (Sintra Statement). Contracting Parties shall apply the precautionary and the polluter-pays principle and take full account of the latest technological developments and practices. One of the tools being developed is "a network of marine protected areas ..."

What has been achieved since 1998?

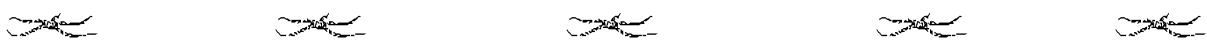
Five years of preparatory work will now lead to the adoption of the "Recommendation on the Creation of an Ecologically Coherent Network of Well-Managed Marine Protected Areas". In practice, however, the conservation of marine wildlife has improved little in this time; most coastal MPAs still lack efficient management, no offshore MPAs (beyond 12 nm) have been designated and implemented, and no national proposals for OSPAR MPAs exist. Furthermore, the necessary harmonisation of the activities under OSPAR with the European network of marine Natura 2000 sites has yet to start and a lack of coordination of OSPAR with fisheries management authorities prevents ecosystem-based management in this sector.

HELCOM

In 1994, the Contracting Parties to the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea (HELCOM) adopted the Recommendation 15/5 which states "the Contracting Parties shall take all appropriate measures to establish a system of coastal and marine Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs)" and "management plans shall be established for each BSPA to ensure nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources". 62 coastal areas, distributed among all Baltic Sea riparian states, were proposed and designated as a first step in establishing such a system. In 1998, an expert report proposed 24 offshore areas to be included in the BSPA-network.

What has been achieved since 1994?

Nine years after the adoption of recommendation 15/5, a network of BSPAs is still missing. Only 5 of the 62 designated coastal BSPAs, and no offshore area (outside 12 nm), have been fully implemented with legal protection, relevant regulations and proper management and reported to HELCOM. Only one country, Lithuania, has implemented all designated areas. Although a number of other BSPAs exist in terms of legal protection the fact is that in many cases only the terrestrial parts of the designated areas are protected and most areas still lack management plan and efficient management for the marine environment. Furthermore, harmonisation of the activities under HELCOM with the European network of marine Natura 2000 sites, has yet to be developed.



WWF calls on Ministers, in both regions, to take action to ensure they meet their commitment given in the Joint Ministerial Declaration 2003 to establish an "ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas ... by 2010" .

To this end, pursue as first steps by 2006:

- the creation of the legal and scientific basis for implementation of conservation measures in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs, or equivalent) of coastal states;
- the implementation of effective management in all existing MPAs/BSPAs;
- the implementation of formal protection and effective management in all 62 coastal Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) as proposed 1994 (HELCOM 15/5) and the 24 offshore BSPAs, as proposed in the 1998 HELCOM expert report;
- national nominations for OSPAR MPAs comprising the full scope of habitats and species occurring in the respective sea area (prior to the deadline of 2006);
- the adoption of a coral-reef action programme by 2004, with cold water coral MPAs covering at least 60 % of the known habitat, being selected and designated by 2006;
- the full implementation of EU Habitats & Birds Directives in coastal areas and offshore;
- the adoption of a High Seas MPA pilot case study by 2004, and the selection of OSPAR High Seas MPAs by 2006; and
- proactive engagement in the resolution of conflicts where the competence for management measures is not with OSPAR and/or HELCOM Contracting Parties.

Marine Protected Areas - an integral component of the Ecosystem-Based Approach to Management

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What are the problems?

Within the 12 nm zone of the territorial seas, the range of human activities results in the continued degradation of habitats and wildlife, and a high potential for conflicts with the user groups. Despite an equally clear obligation to protect the marine environment (UNCLOS) in the offshore areas under the coastal states' jurisdiction, obstacles to delivering proactive environmental policy remain. For example, lack of clarity on national competences for nature conservation, and the continued perception that the sea is an infinite pool of resources. Additional problems include a lack or limited coordination between the different management authorities and few or no structures for practical transboundary cooperation. Furthermore, stakeholder participation and cross-sectorial platforms for communication and decision-making have yet to be developed. For international waters the situation is no clearer; despite increased human pressure the lack of clarity on the legal situation and the limited knowledge base results in conservation action having yet to be considered.



scale physical disturbance of the sediments by bottom trawling may have changed the bottom habitats and communities on the whole European continental shelf, effectively removing fragile and longlived species from soft and hard substrate. More recently the offshore area has come under increasing pressure from human activities due to technological improvements and the depletion of near-coastal resources. This can be illustrated by the fact that scientists estimate 30-50 % of the known cold water coral reefs, occurring along the continental margin, to be damaged by bottom trawling or other human activities, i.e. cable laying.

The way forward

MPAs are areas legally set aside for conservation, where human activities are regulated to prevent damage of particularly vulnerable sites, to foster recovery from previous impacts. MPAs may also be selected because they are considered necessary for safeguarding the essential parts of the natural biodiversity in terms of critical habitat for resident and migratory species, feeding and breeding areas etc. However, whereas the use and exploitation of marine resources is well established and regulated sectorally in national and international legislation not a single legally established and managed site exists in the offshore waters of the North East Atlantic and Baltic Sea.

MPAs and in particular networks of MPAs are an integral part of the ecosystem-based approach to management of human activities. This is a holistic strategy to balance the interests of the users of the sea against the vulnerability of the ecosystem and its integral components. It is based on the precautionary principle, i.e. on the need to minimise the risk of damage to species and habitats, in particular when knowledge is scarce or non-existent, and demands for an integrated ocean policy.

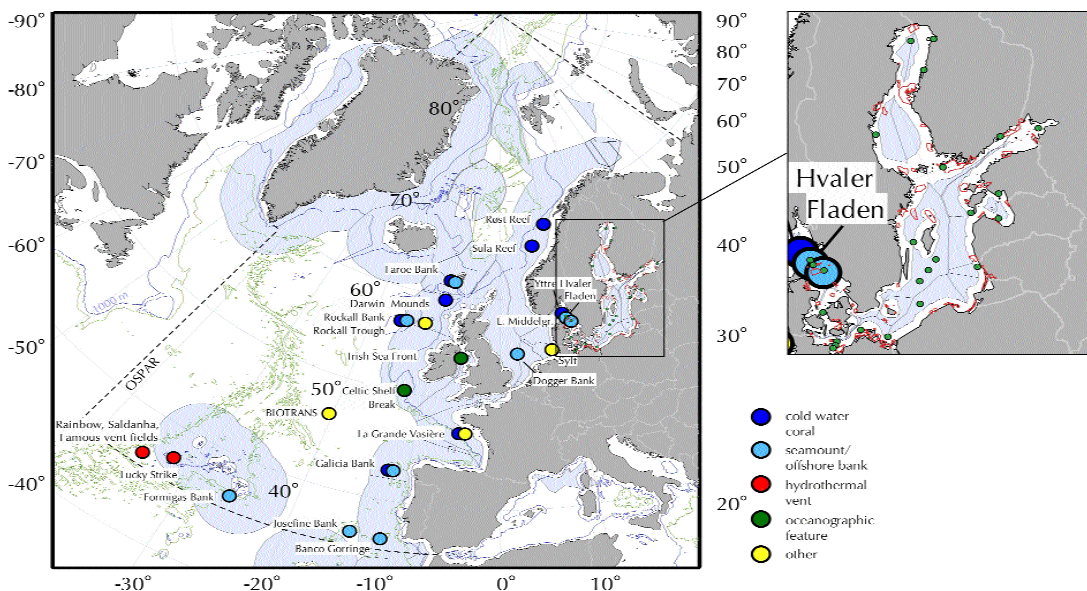
Briefing prepared by Åsa Andersson, Alison Champion and Sabine Christiansen

Why is it so important?

Only the natural range of species, habitats and ecosystem processes can provide us the full benefit of its intrinsic values, its natural capital and ecological services such as nutrient recycling, as traffic lane, as energy and food source or for recreation. It was estimated that the value of ocean and coastal ecosystem services amount to 577 \$ per hectare and year, some 21 times more than the respective gross domestic product of marine industries.

A wide range of human activities can have a substantial impact on the structure and function of local marine ecosystems. Today, the human footprint can be found in the remotest places, be it in the visible form of litter, oil pollution or coastal development, or less obvious or indirect impacts such as alterations to natural ecosystem structure and function due to eutrophication, pollution, overfishing, and fisheries discards and by-catch practices. The large-

More information: • WWF Showcase Examples of Offshore Marine Protected Areas in the North-East Atlantic <http://www.wwfneap.org> • HELCOM-Safari: Baltic Sea Protected Areas (BSPAs) <http://www.helcom.fi> • WWF Reports & Score Cards: From Sintra to Bremen / Helsinki to Bremen - Measuring Progress on Marine Protected Areas (June 2003)



Map on left hand side: WWF showcase examples (1998-2003) for sites to be included in the OSPAR network of MPAs.
Map on right hand side: Baltic Sea Protected Area (BSPAs) proposals following HELCOM Recommendation 15/5 (red areas) and an expert report (Hägerhall & Skov 1998, green dots). Data source for BSPAs: HELCOM/ German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation.